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## Barriers and Enablers to Learning Maths conference

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# Barriers and Enablers to Learning Maths Conference

**T**he first IMA International Conference on Barriers and Enablers to Learning Maths: Enhancing Learning and Teaching for All Learners was held on 10–12 June 2015 at the University of Glasgow. The conference was an enormous success and attended by 75 delegates from the UK as well as overseas. It was a pleasure co-chairing the conference with Dr Marion Hersh from the University of Glasgow.

The two and a half day conference about approaches to teaching and learning mathematics was packed with five keynote addresses and ten parallel sessions. These included three special sessions of which I organised two, focusing on *Addressing mathematics & statistics anxiety* and *Enhancing engagement – with mathematics & statistics*. The third special session was organised by Dr Jeff Waldo on *Student engagement*. Other sessions covered a variety of themes such as accessing maths content, effective practice, inclusive practice, pedagogies, STEM, teaching methods and teachers' training.

Delegates had the opportunity to seek advice from Professor Anne Watson, editor of *Teaching Mathematics and its Applications: an International Journal of the IMA*.

The conference commenced on the morning of 10 June with an inspirational as well as thought provoking keynote address by Professor Bill Barton from the faculty of science, University of Auckland, whose current research projects are Language and mathematics, Ethnomathematics and Teacher development. He talked about *The Pleasure Principle: Allowing pleasure to dominate the mathematical experience* which triggered an interesting and lively discussion. I cannot think of a better way to start the conference.

Professor Ros Sutherland, who is a Professor of Education at the University of Bristol, delivered her keynote on *Mathematical Barriers to Participation in Higher Education* that afternoon. Her research falls into three main areas which include teaching and learning in schools, with a particular focus on mathematics and science and the role of ICT in learning; young people's use of ICT out of school and leadership; and the professional development of teachers. Her address led to interesting questions and



discussion that continued during the tea break.

Professor Dame Celia Hoyles, IMA President and Professor of Mathematics Education at the Institute of Education, University of London delivered her keynote address on the morning of 11 June. She is well known for her expertise in policy, research, students' conceptions of proof, mathematical skills in modern workplaces and computational environments

for learning. The theme of her energising address was *Learning mathematics: challenges and opportunities* which delegates enjoyed thoroughly. The talk led to some intellectually stimulating conversations with young researchers.

The afternoon keynote address was given by Claire Trott from Loughborough University on *Dyslexia and Dyscalculia: exploring issues through case studies*. It led to an interesting discussion during the tea break. Claire is a Mathematics Support Tutor at the Mathematics Education Centre, Loughborough University, since 1999. She specialises in the provision of one-to-one mathematics support for students with additional needs or who are low in mathematical confidence.

Friday 12 June commenced with a keynote address by Dr Colin Jones from the School of Management, University of Tasmania, and I was intrigued by the lively discussion that followed. Dr Jones is an outstanding orator and his area of expertise is Entrepreneurship having won several excellence and innovation awards. He was an Invited Expert Assessor for 2006 Carrick Awards for Australian University Teaching Awards and has served University of Tasmania Teaching and Learning Committee. He has also been the Vice President of International Committee – Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand.

The Drinks Reception was held in the highly prestigious Glasgow City Chambers on the evening of 10 June. Delegates had the opportunity to meet Bailie Dr Nina Baker after her address. The Conference dinner was on 11 June in the stylish setting of the Brasserie Restaurant at Òran Mór, a spectacular venue in the heart of Glasgow's West End. Both events provided delegates, keynote speakers and the organising committee the perfect setting to network and socialise.

It was uplifting to observe the delegates' overwhelming enthusiasm, which was maintained until the conference ended on Friday with several delegates continuing with their discussions. This conference will hopefully be the beginning of a series.

I should like to express my gratitude to everyone at the University of Glasgow who made the delegates feel extremely welcome and helped with various matters including the technology.

A number of delegates expressed admiration about the seamless running of the conference for which the credit, in my opinion, goes to the IMA Conferences Team: Lizzi Lake, Lucy Dunford and Pam Bye.

The conference might impact research in mathematics anxiety, inclusive practice and statistics education. For the next conference... watch this space!



Dr Colin Jones (Keynote speaker), Dame Celia Hoyles (IMA President and Keynote speaker), Meena Kotecha (Co-Chair)

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